

**DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE**  
**YOUTH, PEACEBUILDING AND REGIONAL SOLIDARITY: LESSONS FROM**  
***Africa***

*“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”*  
(Preamble to UNESCO Constitution, 1945)

**BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

In early February, 2017, Gambians from all walks of life streamed onto the streets of Banjul, the capital city, to triumphantly welcome home their new president, Adama Barrow, who, a few days earlier had been sworn into office, in neighbouring Senegal, as only the 3<sup>rd</sup> President of the Republic, in the country’s political history. Barrow’s return home was preceded by departure from the country, a few days earlier by one-time military dictator and strongman, Yaya Jammeh, after mounting domestic and external pressure on him to step down and hand over power to his successor, following weeks of recalcitrance on his part. For 22 years, Jammeh had presided over the destiny of Gambia and Gambians, ruling the tiny West African state as his personal fiefdom, with significant human toll on citizens.

However, in December 2016, Jammeh reached his waterloo, following his surprise defeat in multiparty elections that were generally seen to be free, fair, transparent, and above all meeting of international standards. After weeks of denial and outright refusal by Jammeh to peacefully transfer power to his successor, he finally threw in the towel when it became clear that his support base within the country had shrunk to almost nothing, and troops from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), led by the Senegalese military, with the backing of the Africa Union (AU) and United Nations, were prepared to oust him by force, should he continue his defiance. Two significant lessons to be drawn from the Gambia experience, worth celebrating, and reflecting upon at the same time are: i) the power of the Gambian youth, organised both within and outside of the traditional political parties, in championing the democratic transition in their country, and ii) regional solidarity by neighbouring West African States, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), backed by a credible threat of the use of force to restore democracy and the Rule of Law.

Where the first lesson is concerned, namely; the power of youth in propelling the democratic transition in The Gambia, it sends a clear message that young people across the world, and certainly in Africa, are increasingly becoming determined to lead a “peoples’ revolution” that would forever transform their countries for the better, and leaders who refuse to yield to their demands, do so at their own peril. It is worth recalling that in 2016, The Gambia hosted the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Africa Youth Charter (hereafter referred to as the Charter). Those celebrations provided AU Member States a unique opportunity to take stock of progress made in specifically implementing provisions of the Youth Charter, as well as broadly reflecting on the challenges of youth development in the continent, and more importantly, how best to collectively address those challenges, particularly in the areas of peace and security, in order to create a conducive environment for the youth to explore their full potentials. On that occasion, UNESCO, at the request of the AU, organized a 3-day training workshop

on youth, peace and security, covering a range of topics, including violent extremism, gender equality, global citizenship, and designed to equip the young participants with the skills necessary to take action to effect positive change in their countries. It therefore did not come as an entire surprise that when the opportunity availed itself, young Gambians took advantage and led the way in bringing change to their country. This is no mean feat, and hence there are lessons the continent can learn from that. It should be recalled that Gambian youth had all along challenged the authoritarian rule of Jammeh and paid a heavy price for its bravery: way back in April 2000, student protests led to the killing of 11 students; Solo Sandeng, the youth leader of the main opposition party UDP, was arrested and tortured to death in April 2016 after leading a peaceful march calling for the reform of the electoral code. This event is usually taken to be a the turning point after which the march towards the defeat of the Jammeh regime was accelerated.

On the second lesson, namely; regional solidarity, it is clear that ECOWAS' proactive diplomatic pressure, backed by a credible threat of the use of force, nicely complimented the civic resistance generated in The Gambia itself, and ultimately played a pivotal role in bringing about change. To be clear though, military-led interventions aimed at ending conflicts are not new in West Africa. Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, ECOWAS countries were very instrumental in bringing to an end armed conflicts in both Liberia (who will undergo its legislative and presidential elections in October 2017) and Sierra Leone, etc. While those interventions drew the ire of critics, at the time, mainly on the grounds that they did not have prior UN Security Council authorization before deployment of troops, in hindsight, those initial actions turned out to be transformational in the history of international peacekeeping. For one thing, those actions did not only help save thousands, if not millions of lives, thus lending true meaning to the concept of (regional and international) solidarity, but indeed significantly contributed to truly strengthening Chapter 8 provision of the UN Charter, the so-called "regional arrangements" chapter, as originally conceived by the founders of the Organization. From that point forward, third party military interventions, based on humanitarian and other considerations, especially in Africa, have in large measure been put in place through arrangements that have typically allowed regional economic communities like ECOWAS to take the lead, backed by the AU and the UN. The Gambia situation thus clearly marked a new but significant chapter in that evolution.

## **A PROPOSED REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON LESSONS FROM BANJUL**

Against this backdrop, and within the context of its partnership with the African Union, UNESCO and CODESRIA, in collaboration with ECOWAS and the Government of the Gambia, propose a two-day regional conference, bringing together youth leaders from across Africa, along with other partners, to celebrate the victory in The Gambia, but also use the occasion to reflect on youth movements' role in the transition and consolidation of democracy. The conference will, among others, provide a platform for the youth and other partners, to salute the courage of the Gambian youth, while also broadly reflecting on the opportunities and challenges of youth development in the continent, with a view to finding common ground on how to collectively address them.

Historically, youth have played significant roles as agents of change and supported democratic transition in Africa. In Southern Africa, for instance, in the 1960s, 1970s and

1980s youth played important roles in spearheading the political and economic transition from colonial rule and apartheid to African independent rule as political activists and trained freedom fighters. Although some Southern African youth continue to play an active role in pushing for post apartheid transformation of the universities and the economy, democratic changes and the consolidation of democratic governance in the region, the majority of youth are not part of the decisions and political processes that are shaping Southern African societies. They are on the contrary among the most vulnerable societal groups to economic, political and even environmental choc. Despite the positive strides that have been made to put youth concerns at the heart of the development agenda and increase the participation of youth in governance, peace and development processes in the region, the youth's participation in society is still limited by a number of challenges and weaknesses in existing frameworks and interventions. These challenges and weakness include the following: Participation without representation, limited allocation of resources for the advancement of youth, economic marginality, and skills deficits.

In most of the recent experiences of democratic transition in which the youth was at the forefront (from the 'Arab Spring, through the experiences of Senegal's *Yen a Marre* and Burkina Faso's *Balai Citoyen*, to The Gambia), the challenge has been that of defining and sustaining a leading role for the youth in the post-transition regimes. The same question is posed in The Gambia today, where the predominantly youth movement *#GambiaHasDecided* is trying to redefine its role in the new democratic dispensation.

In proposing this activity, it is also important to locate it in the wider context of international development thinking of the day, and specifically recall the critical juncture at which we find ourselves now, globally speaking. Of critical importance are the AU's *Agenda 2063* and the UN's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, both of which are now being aligned with national policy priorities at the country level. This is quite significant both for Africa and UNESCO and the UN, not least because many of the issues identified as critical to the continent's long-term development, especially where the youth are concerned, including, among others, access to quality education for all, the role of science and technology in accelerating Africa's development and the need to peaceful co-existence in our respective societies, as reflected in *Agenda 2063*, also find their way in the SDGs. All of these, and many more are directly relevant to addressing the challenges that face the African youth today. For UNESCO, this is consistent with the substance of the Organization's *Operational Strategy for Priority Africa (2014-2021)*, as well as its *Operational Strategy for Youth (2014-2021)*, both of which provide a broad framework for engaging the AU and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs), particularly on youth issues. Youth and intergenerational issues are also among the cross-cutting issues of CODESRIA's 2017-2021 Strategic Plan.

Finally, it is also worth recalling here UN Security Council Resolution 2250 adopted in 2015, specifically calling on Member States to, among others, put in place, "Measures that support local youth peace initiatives (...) and empower youth in peacebuilding and conflict resolution." That resolution further provides impetus for UNESCO to work with CODESRIA, the AU, ECOWAS and other partners in designing

programme interventions meant to highlight youth voices in the quest for peace and reconciliation in their respective countries, and this conference hope to contribute to that.

## **GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

The overall goal of this initiative is to strengthening capacity of youth to lead Action at both community and national levels.

This conference hopes to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Provide a platform for sharing of experiences, lessons learned and reflections on the role of the youth in the democratic transition in Africa: drawing lessons from the Gambian experience and bringing lessons from the experience of other African countries to The Gambia.
- Highlight the critical importance of regional and international solidarity in an increasingly uncertain world, in the interest of positive social transformations in Africa.
- Gain a thorough understanding of the role of youth movements after democratic and post-conflict transitions, and present positive experiences of youth led initiatives and well-articulated political and social agenda during a democratic transition.
- Problematize the future of youth development in Africa, in the light of the major regional and international development frameworks, including but not limited to the *AU Agenda 2063*, and the UN's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.
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## **FORMAT OF THE CONFERENCE**

The format of this conference will be a combination of plenary deliberations and working group discussions. In addition to the opening speeches, which will also set the tone for further deliberations, at least three other roundtable discussions are proposed, with each one focusing on the key conceptual and operational issues related to youth development, peace and security. This will be followed by three working group discussions covering the same topics, the outcomes of which will be presented in the plenary session.

## **PROFILE OF SPEAKERS AND AUDIENCE**

The opening speeches will feature representatives from the various partner institutions, while the roundtable discussions will each feature a maximum of four speakers with expertise and/or competence on the given subject matter, along with a moderator. The audience will comprise a cross-section of youth representatives, scholars, policymakers, AU, ECOWAS and UN officials, the private sector and civil society.

## **OUTPUT/DELIVERABLE**

- Video recording and written proceedings of the conference compiled and made available for dissemination
- Collaboration among UNESCO Regional Offices in Africa and CODESRIA for a follow-up strategy to support regional and interregional youth synergies for active citizenship democratic participation and sustainable peace.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

- **UNESCO:** Through its Regional Offices in Abuja, Dakar, Harare, Nairobi and Yaoundé, UNESCO is responsible for the overall conceptualization and execution of the workshop.
- **UN Country Team (The Gambia):** Through the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in The Gambia, the UNCT will provide strategic guidance and direction, ensuring active participation of UN Agencies in the workshop.
- **CODESRIA:** Through the Office of Executive Secretary will contribute to the reflexion and provide at least one of the key speakers and ensure active participation in the follow up of the conference.
- **The ECOWAS Commission:** Through its Political Affairs Commission Division, the ECOWAS will be a strategic partner for the conference.
- **Media Partner(s):** A local media partner, to be identified, will assist in publicizing the workshop as well as promoting coverage in various media outlets, including print, radio, television and online.